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Iraq, in an Unconfirmed Report, Says It Ruined Iranian Oil Depot

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WASHINGTON, Aug. 15 — The Iraqi Government, locked in a five-year war with Iran, said today that its fighter-bombers had "demolished" Iran's oil shipping terminal on Kharg island. But United States officials said they had no information that would confirm the assertion.

A military communiqué broadcast in Baghdad, the Iraqi capital, said Iraqi planes had dealt a "crushing" blow to the island and had "changed it into ashes."

United States officials reported that Iran later broadcast an assertion that it had shot down one Iraqi aircraft north of Kharg. One American official said it appeared that an Iraqi attack did take place today, but this official and others said it was unclear whether the major damage claimed by Baghdad had occurred.

One United States official said sources in the shipping industry had reported that a Norwegian oil tanker had been damaged at Kharg, but that the damage was believed to be light.

Iran and Iraq have been at war since September 1980. Ground fighting has been inconclusive, but Iraq has many more combat-worthy aircraft than Iran.

Island Plays Key Role

Most of Iran's oil for export is shipped from mainland oil fields by pipeline to Kharg, an island in the Persian Gulf about 30 miles off the Iranian coast and 110 miles southeast of Iraq.

An American specialist on the area said the pipeline works on a gravity system and does not rely greatly on compressors and pumps.

This, he said, makes it more difficult to inflict significant damage by bombing and also makes the system relatively easy to repair.

The specialist noted that in almost five years of war Iraq had not succeeded in putting the oil terminal at Kharg out of commission or even stopping neutral shipping from using the island.

On the other hand, one official noted that the attack occurred at 7:10 A.M. New York time. If United States reconnaissance satellites were in a position to view the island then, he said, it would take time for photo interpreters to assess the damage. He said he did not know if any American satellites had been in a position to take such photographs.

"It would take a lot of firepower to knock out the island," said another official. "We have nothing that would confirm those reports."

Little Effect Foreseen

Oil industry analysts said yesterday that although prices for crude oil on the open market would rise somewhat if the oil terminal at Kharg was heavily damaged or destroyed, as Iraq has asserted, the world's crude oil supply would not be greatly affected.

They said that the 1 million to 1.5 million barrels a day that Iran exports, mostly to Japan and Western Europe, could easily be replaced because there is now a worldwide oversupply of crude oil. Under the production ceiling set by the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries, Iran's overall oil production is 2.4 million barrels a day.

Nonetheless, the analysts said, destruction of the oil terminal at Kharg could affect the world oil situation by provoking Iran into carrying out its often-made threat to attack oil installations in Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, Iraq's chief allies in the Gulf war, or to disrupt shipping in the Persian Gulf.